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Dancing the Cows Home: a Wisconsin Girlhood

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It offers much of value, though. For the casual seeker of barns, this is a handy guide for field identification. For the more serious student, the volume shows how much work remains to be done on the varieties of midwestern barns.

From the Hidewood: Memories of a Dakota Neighborhood, by Robert Amerson. Midwest Reflections Series. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. xiv, 364 pp. Illustrations, map. \$32.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY JAMES MARTEN, MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY

Robert Amerson and his family moved to a rented farm in 1934 with no electricity, phone, central heating, or indoor bathroom. Connected to the nearest town by an unreliable dirt road, the Amersons farmed their quarter-section with horses long after some of their neighbors had bought tractors. Amerson tells about this depression boyhood with a hybrid of history, memoir, and fiction (Amerson dug through county records and newspapers and freely admits that he invented most of the dialogue). Some of his stories may evoke nostalgia, yet the Amersons are not the Waltons, and although many of the chapters end a little too tidily—with problems resolved and the family's firm resolution restored—Amerson does not whitewash rural life. Frustrations abound: a stoic, often noncommittal father, ethnic tension in the form of Robert's mother's resentment of the way she was treated by the "Norskies" as a young bride, the blasted dreams of neighbors and family members seeking their fortunes in far-off places. And, always, there is the sense of inferiority that farmers felt in the presence of better-off and slightly exotic town folk.

I grew up a couple of counties and a couple of decades away from Amerson's Hidewood—in fact, I was one of those not-quite-to-be-trusted town boys—yet this book rings true, not as an elegy to "olden times," but as a reflection on midwestern experiences that cuts across generations.

Dancing the Cows Home: A Wisconsin Girlhood, by Sara De Luca. Midwest Reflections Series. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1996. ix, 232 pp. Illustrations. \$24.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY ALISON PHILLIPS KOVAC, IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

The photograph on the dust jacket of *Dancing the Cows Home* reveals something of the story inside. In the foreground, attractive teenaged twin sisters dance together in lovely pink and blue dresses. In contrast, the farmstead behind and all around the dancers is dingy gray and

black. Like the picture, the story contrasts the work-a-day realities of a Wisconsin dairy farm family with the individual family members' longings and strivings for culture, beauty, spirituality, achievement, and adventure.

Sara De Luca, one of the girls in the photograph, is the author of *Dancing the Cows Home*—the second book in the Midwest Reflections Series of memoirs and personal histories of the people of the upper Midwest. When her grown sons commented on the strangeness of the title and asked her what she was writing about, De Luca replied that the book was about change and stability, finding roots and getting free. Pressed further, she told her sons she was writing about her "mother and her appetite for work, [her] siblings and their craving for beauty and perfection, [her] father and his need to know the world that stretched beyond his fence line" (232). *Dancing the Cows Home* is an intensely personal story, but it is also a story that will be familiar to readers who have grown up in the rural Midwest—particularly to those who came of age during the 1950s. Readers interested in mid-western agricultural and rural life will be rewarded by De Luca's insightful descriptions of farm life, family life, religion, education, health care, animal husbandry, and rural community.

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